

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A watercraft comprising a rudder unit, a steering position input device configured to provide a position command signal indicative of a position of the rudder unit, at least one of an azimuth sensing device configured to sense an actual azimuth of the watercraft to provide an actual azimuth signal or a location sensing device configured to sense an actual location of the watercraft to provide an actual location signal, a control device configured to control the position of the rudder unit, a control data input device configured to selectively provide the control device with a first mode signal that starts a first mode of the control device and a second mode signal that starts a second mode of the control device, the second mode signal being accompanied by a target azimuth signal indicative of a target azimuth of the watercraft or a target location signal indicative of a target location of the watercraft, the control device controlling the position of the rudder unit based upon the position command signal in the first mode, the control device controlling the position of the rudder unit such that an actual azimuth amount designated by the actual azimuth signal generally coincides with a target azimuth amount designated by the target azimuth signal, and the control device starting the first mode in place of the second mode without the first mode signal if the position command signal changes while the control device controls the position of the rudder unit in the second mode.

2. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the control device remains in the first mode when the control device changes from the second mode to the first mode without the first mode signal.

3. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the second mode signal is canceled when the control device changes from the second mode to the first mode without the first mode signal.

4. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the control data input device comprises a mode selector through which the first and second mode signals are selectively provided to the control device.

5. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 4, wherein the control data input device additionally comprises a data input unit, the target azimuth signal or the target location signal is inputted by the data input unit.

6. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 4, wherein the control data input device automatically returns the mode selector to a position in which the mode selector provides the first mode signal.

7. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 6 additionally comprising an actuator, the mode selector including a switch movable between a first mode position corresponding to the first mode and a second mode position corresponding to the second mode, the actuator coercively returning the switch to the first mode position.

8. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the control device controls the position of the rudder unit using a position control amount calculated based upon the actual azimuth amount and the target azimuth amount in the second mode.

9. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 8, wherein the control device calculates the target azimuth amount based upon an actual location amount designated by the actual location signal and a target location amount designated by the target location signal.

10. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 8, wherein the control device determines whether the position control amount is greater than a preset control amount threshold, the control device controls the rudder unit using the position control amount if the position control amount is equal to or less than the preset control amount threshold or another position control amount that does not exceed the preset position control amount threshold if the position control amount is greater than the preset position control amount threshold.

11. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the control device controls the position of the rudder unit such that the actual azimuth amount gradually approaches the target azimuth amount.

12. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 1 additionally comprising a position sensing device configured to sense an actual position of the rudder unit, the control device controlling the position of the rudder unit using a position control amount calculated based upon the position command signal provided by the command input device and an actual position sensed by the position sensing device in the first mode.

13. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the control device changes the second mode to the first mode without the first mode signal when a difference between a position command amount designated by the position command signal and a position command reference amount is equal to or greater than a preset command threshold.

14. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 1 additionally comprising a network system that has multiple nodes communicating with each other, the network system at least including a first node for the steering position input device, a second node for the azimuth sensing device or the location sensing device, a third node for the control device and a fourth node for the control data input device.

15. The watercraft as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the rudder unit comprises a rudder and an actuator that actuates the rudder, the control device controls a position of the actuator to control the position of the rudder unit.

16. A watercraft comprising a rudder unit, a steering position input device configured to provide a position command signal indicative of a position of the rudder unit, at least one of a azimuth sensing device configured to sense an actual azimuth of the watercraft to provide an actual azimuth signal or a location sensing device configured to sense an actual location of the watercraft to provide an actual location signal, a control device configured to control the position of the rudder unit, a control data input device configured to selectively provide the control device with a first mode signal that starts a first mode of the control device and a second mode signal that starts a second mode of the control device, the second mode signal being accompanied by a target azimuth signal indicative of a target azimuth of the watercraft or a target location signal indicative of a target location of the watercraft, the control device controlling the position of the rudder unit based upon the position command signal in the first mode, the control device controlling the position of the rudder unit such that an actual azimuth amount designated by the actual azimuth signal generally coincides with a target azimuth amount designated by the target azimuth signal, and the control device controlling the rudder unit based upon the position command signal if the position command signal changes while the control device controls the rudder unit in the second mode.

17. A steering control system for a watercraft having a rudder unit comprising a steering position input device configured to provide a position command signal indicative of a position of the rudder unit, at least one of a azimuth sensing device configured to sense an actual azimuth of the watercraft to provide an actual azimuth signal or a location sensing device configured to sense an actual location of the watercraft to provide an actual location signal, a control device configured to control the position of the rudder unit, a control data input device configured to selectively provide the control device with a first mode signal that starts a first mode of the control device and a second mode signal that starts a second mode of the control device, the second mode signal being accompanied by a target azimuth signal indicative of a target azimuth of the watercraft or a target location signal indicative of a target location of the watercraft, the control device controlling the position of the rudder unit based upon the position command signal in the first mode, the control device controlling the position of the rudder unit such that an actual azimuth amount designated by the actual azimuth signal generally coincides with a

target azimuth amount designated by the target azimuth signal in the second mode, and the control device starting the first mode in place of the second mode without the first mode signal if the position command signal changes while the control device controls the position of the rudder unit in the second mode.

18. A control method for controlling a position of a rudder of a watercraft comprising generating a position command signal indicative of a position of the rudder, either sensing an actual azimuth of the watercraft to generate an actual azimuth signal or sensing an actual location of the watercraft to generate an actual location signal, generating a first mode signal that starts a first mode, generating a second mode signal that starts a second mode, either generating a target azimuth signal indicative of a target azimuth of the watercraft or generating a target location signal indicative of a target location of the watercraft, controlling the position of the rudder based upon the position command signal in the first mode, controlling the position of the rudder such that an actual azimuth amount designated by the actual azimuth signal generally coincides with a target azimuth amount designated by the target azimuth signal, determining whether the position command signal changes while controlling the position of the rudder in the second mode, and starting the first mode in place of the second mode without the first mode signal if the determination is positive.

19. The control method as set forth in Claim 18 additionally comprising holding the first mode when the first mode is started without the first mode signal.

20. The control method as set forth in Claim 18 additionally comprising canceling the second mode signal afterwards when the first mode is started without the first mode signal.

21. The control method as set forth in Claim 18 additionally comprising calculating a position control amount based upon the actual azimuth amount and the target azimuth amount, and controlling the position of the rudder using the position control amount in the second mode.

22. The control method as set forth in Claim 21 additionally comprising calculating the target azimuth amount based upon an actual location amount designated by the actual location signal and a target location amount designated by the target location signal.

23. The control method as set forth in Claim 18 additionally comprising determining whether the position control amount is greater than a preset control amount threshold, and controlling the rudder using the position control amount if the position

control amount is equal to or less than the preset position control amount threshold or another position control amount that does not exceed the preset position control amount threshold if the position control amount is greater than the preset position control amount threshold

24. The control method as set forth in Claim 18 additionally comprising controlling the position of the rudder such that the actual azimuth amount gradually approaches the target azimuth amount.

25. The control method as set forth in Claim 18 additionally comprising sensing an actual position of the rudder to generate an actual position signal, calculating a position control amount based upon a position command amount designated by the position command signal and an actual position amount designated by the actual position signal, and controlling the position of the rudder using the position control amount in the first mode.

26. The control method as set forth in Claim 18 additionally comprising determining whether a difference between a position command amount designated by the position command signal and a position command reference amount is equal to or greater than a preset command threshold, the first mode started without the first mode signal when the difference is equal to or greater than the preset command threshold.

27. A control method for controlling a position of a rudder of a watercraft comprising generating a position command signal indicative of a position of the rudder, either sensing an actual azimuth of the watercraft to generate an actual azimuth signal or sensing an actual location of the watercraft to generate an actual location signal, generating a first mode signal that starts a first mode, generating a second mode signal that starts a second mode, either generating a target azimuth signal indicative of a target azimuth of the watercraft or generating a target location signal indicative of a target location of the watercraft, controlling the position of the rudder based upon the position command signal in the first mode, controlling the position of the rudder such that an actual azimuth designated by the actual azimuth signal generally coincides with a target azimuth amount designated by the target azimuth signal, determining whether the position command signal changes while the control device controls the position of the rudder in the second mode, and controlling the rudder based upon the position signal if the determination is positive.